

## Message

**From:** Miller, Amy [Miller.Amy@epa.gov]  
**Sent:** 12/22/2016 7:44:55 PM  
**To:** Martinez, Brittany [Martinez.Brittany@epa.gov]; Grow, Richard [Grow.Richard@epa.gov]; Reyes, Deldi [Reyes.Deldi@epa.gov]  
**Subject:** Fwd: Letter to editor from Honolulu Civil Beat: The State's Latest Pesticide Initiatives Miss the Mark Yet Again

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** "Higuchi, Dean" <Higuchi.Dean@epa.gov>  
**Date:** December 22, 2016 at 12:45:27 PM EST  
**To:** "Miller, Amy" <Miller.Amy@epa.gov>, "Strauss, Alexis" <Strauss.Alexis@epa.gov>, "McWhorter, Scott" <mcwhorter.scott@epa.gov>, "TenBrook, Patti" <TenBrook.Patti@epa.gov>, "Grisier, Mary" <Grisier.Mary@epa.gov>  
**Subject:** Letter to editor from Honolulu Civil Beat: The State's Latest Pesticide Initiatives Miss the Mark Yet Again

### The State's Latest Pesticide Initiatives Miss the Mark Yet Again

The state's initiatives address acute exposure to pesticides, but long-term exposure to low levels poses the greater risk.

December 21, 2016 · By [Ashley Lukens](#) *Commentary/letter to editor from Honolulu Civil Beat*

We've gotten really good at waiting. In fact, we've been waiting three years for the state or the counties in Hawaii to take meaningful action to protect our communities from pesticide drift.

And for many, in the midst of this waiting, the recent announcement by the state departments of Agriculture and Health regarding initiatives to address community concerns about pesticide exposure seems like progress. Progress from nothing is, well, progress.

But here is why I'm fed up and asking all of you to please critically respond to this announcement as we continue our grassroots fight to protect our families from the outdoor experiments of multi-national agrichemical companies. The state's initiatives address acute exposure to pesticides, while the medical literature confirms that long-term (chronic) exposure to low levels of toxic pesticides poses the greater risk to human health.

When you read the state's press release, you'll notice that most of the proposed initiatives are designed to address pesticide "incidents" – that is, one-time (acute) exposure to large amounts of a pesticide, resulting in nausea, vomiting, difficulty breathing, and similar symptoms.

These incidents are important and headline-grabbing. Many have heard about the hospitalization of 10 Syngenta field workers exposed to chlorpyrifos – an insecticide so toxic that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency banned from home uses 15 years ago, and early this year proposed to prohibit farm spraying as well.

We also know of the many schoolchildren sickened in various pesticide drift incidents at Waimea Canyon Middle School, including some sent to the emergency room. And it's not just Kauai. Dozens of students and staff were sickened by off-school use of chemicals (most likely pesticides) at Kahului Elementary School. These are just a few of many pesticide poisoning incidents that have occurred in the state. Many more likely go unreported.

We know acute exposure to pesticides is a problem, and that in some cases it can lead to lasting health impairment. So the state's initiatives to educate homeowners about pesticide use, form rapid-response teams to better respond to pesticide poisoning episodes and educate physicians to recognize symptoms of pesticide poisoning are all welcome. But they are far from being enough.

This is because the initiatives do nothing to address the disease burden from chronic exposure to pesticides, as documented in the medical literature. We know, based on numerous epidemiological studies and other lines of evidence, that long-term, low-level exposure to chemicals like chlorpyrifos, atrazine, paraquat, and others used every month on Kauai and other islands causes real harms, especially to agricultural workers and children.

Workers exposed to toxic pesticides have higher rates of chronic diseases such as bladder and colon cancer, non-Hodgkin lymphoma, Parkinson's disease and depression. Children who live or go to school near genetically engineered crop test fields operated by the likes of Monsanto and Dow are at high risk of regular exposure to pesticides drifting onto them from spraying operations.

Pesticide exposure is particularly hazardous for young and unborn children, who are at heightened risk of neurodevelopmental disabilities like autism and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Other diseases linked to pesticide exposure in children include leukemia and asthma.

Chronic exposure is the expected outcome when a company sprays pesticides year-round, two of three days, up to 16 times a day, as is done for example by DuPont on Kauai. Exposure is all the more likely under windy conditions (spray drift) and when it's still and hot (vapor drift). Although spraying is often officially prohibited under such conditions by on-label warnings, there is abundant evidence that it occurs, and occurs frequently, nonetheless. Pesticides can drift onto children playing out of doors, and can even infiltrate homes and classrooms.

Chronic exposure to pesticides is not effectively mitigated by forming interagency rapid-response teams, educating homeowners or resolving discrepancies in birth defects registries. Lessening exposure to pesticides requires full implementation of the measures recommended by the Joint Fact-Finding Study Group, a committee of experts that undertook a year-long investigation of the impacts of pesticide use by the GE seed industry and Kauai Coffee on Kauai.

The JFF recommended that Gov. David Ige and state agencies "undertake a major update to Hawaii's pesticide laws and regulations." Recommendations included setting lower exposure limits for chronic exposure to hazardous pesticides; mandatory public disclosure of pesticide use by all large users; and establishment of a consistent, no-spray buffer zone policy around schools and other institutions where people congregate.

State actions should also include stricter oversight of agrichemical companies that spray large quantities of restricted and general use pesticides on their GE corn test fields. But this is unlikely to happen as long as the Department of Agriculture is in denial.

According to The Economist, DOA officials think that agri-chemical companies apply pesticides in the state “better than anybody ever has.” Then why, one might ask, have children in Waimea been sickened by pesticide drift from neighboring GE test fields?

Why did EPA just file a complaint against Syngenta for allowing up to 38 workers at its Kauai operations to be illegally exposed to the highly toxic insecticide chlorpyrifos? The episode, for which EPA is seeking \$4.8 million in civil penalties, involved 261 violations of federal law governing farmworker safety. Everything from lack of warning signs and failure to provide instructions not to enter a toxic treated field, to absence of accessible decontamination supplies and delays in transporting exposed workers to hospitals.

If this is how companies treat their workers, how much more negligent are they when it’s the public’s health that’s at stake?

The measures just announced by the state departments of Agriculture and Health to better address acute pesticide poisonings are all well and good. But we should not even begin to mistake them for the thoroughgoing reform we need to truly protect Hawaii’s keiki and environment from the the harms caused by toxic pesticide exposure.

Sign the petition for no-spray pesticide buffer zones and mandatory pesticide disclosure and notification this legislative session. Read Hawaii Center for Food Safety’s report, Pesticides in Paradise: Hawaii’s Health and Environment at Risk, to learn more.

Community Voices aims to encourage broad discussion on many topics of community interest. It’s kind of a cross between Letters to the Editor and op-eds. This is your space to talk about important issues or interesting people who are making a difference in our world. Columns generally run about 800 words (yes, they can be shorter or longer) and we need a photo of the author and a bio. We welcome video commentary and other multimedia formats. Send to [news@civilbeat.com](mailto:news@civilbeat.com).

## About the Author



Ashley Lukens

Ashley Lukens, Ph.D, is an advocate for sustainable and just food systems. Her work focuses on human and environmental health and how such issues relate to food. She is program director for the Hawaii Center for Food Safety and she founded the Hawaii Food Policy Council. She teaches political science at both University of Hawaii-Manoa and West Oahu.

Thanks!

Dean Higuchi  
Press Officer/Congressional Liaison/Public Affairs  
US EPA, Region 9, Hawaii Office  
[higuchi.dean@epa.gov](mailto:higuchi.dean@epa.gov)  
808-541-2711